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SOVIET PRESENCE, HOW TO ASSESS IT.

1. We are frequently asked to assess the nature and effectiveness of Soviet penetration, presence, and influence in a particular area of the world, but most often the Middle East. Some times the topic is Soviet penetration in a country; Afghanistan was a popular one up to about 1966, the UAR heads the list in the mid-60s. More often a particularly juicy-sounding geopolitical region is the focus of attention. The current favorites are "The Red Sea Basin", popularized by Ambassador Korry, and the larger Morocco-Somalia-Iran triangle sponsored by the Economist. The latter is also the area of a special inter-departmental study group headed by Ambassador Holmes.

2. Frankly, we have a hell of a time trying to come out with sensible estimates, which are not at variance with at least one major segment of our readership, on the USSR's position, power, and influence in a given place, and on what the Soviet position means for US and Western position, power, and influence in the same place. There are two separate, but closely related, aspects of this problem. One is to come up

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with a reasonably accurate description of what in fact the Soviets have done in a given area and how to put this on some sort of a scale of value. The other is to assess what the preceding means in terms of Soviet power and influence. *and intention*

3. These twin problems derive in large measure from sharply differing philosophies of international relations held in official Washington. Broadly speaking, there is a school of thought which subscribes to the postwar policy of containing the Soviet Union within the narrowest feasible physical limitations. For this group, the establishment by a country of diplomatic relations with the USSR or the acceptance by it of economic, and especially military, assistance is a "default" for the US. "Success" for the US conversely comes to be portrayed as keeping the Soviets out or limiting them to formal and restricted relations. In a rare case, such as occurred last year in Ghana, it can mean loss by the Soviets of an impressive position.

4. At the other end of the spectrum, and again speaking very broadly, there is a school which takes the view that the USSR is a great power, the second strongest in the world, and that it is therefore going to act as a great power. Thus it will use the customary instruments of contemporary statecraft--

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trade, aid, propaganda -- as well as subversion and displays of military might to advance its interests. For this school, the extension of Soviet presence, however deplorable and inimical to US interests, is natural and to a certain measure inevitable. For this group, the continuation of the situation which prevailed in the early 1950s, when colonial control or post-colonial European domination was the rule in the Middle East, is simply not a practical matter. Nor is that situation the Standard by which Soviet positions today should be measured.

5. Now, this divergence of view, which for the purposes of argument is exaggerated somewhat, since there are gradations in both schools, does not much affect assessment of the facts of the Soviet presence. Numbers of technicians, quantities of tanks and aircraft, and amounts of economic assistance are measurable quantities, and within the limitations of intelligence coverage, generate little dispute. The real problems come over the judgments as to consequences, meaning, and intentions of giver and recipient in these cases. Some of these disputes flow from simplistic appreciations by those who interpret every Soviet move as part of a vast conspiracy, others flow from the win-lose theory noted above, and still others from the

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extraordinary difficulties of trying to assess the consequences of one or of a series of Soviet moves on the attitudes, political beliefs, and social customs of a given group of people without the advantages of historical perspective or even of such contemporary empirical evidence as opinion polls.

6. Thus we oftentimes wrangle over such questions as the extent to which a continual drumfire of government statements, radio, and newspaper language taking a pro-Soviet line is having on the Syrian (or Iraqi, or whatever) population. Or what it indicates as to the real attitude of the regime making those statements. There are disputes over the effectiveness of the Soviet presence in Egypt and the degree of influence the Soviets have there. Compare the following:

"In general, he (Nasser) will not seek or accept any relationship based on broad understanding and trust with either the US or the USSR, nor will he modify his policies and actions within Egypt or in the Arab world to preserve or improve his relations with Moscow or Washington." SNIE 36.1-62, 28 March 1962.

"Nasser and his associates have generally shown themselves to be competent and tough-minded in maintaining their independence of action from the Soviet Union. Nasser aimed at avoiding complete dependence upon the Soviet Bloc. He has refused to support the USSR on a number of key issues." NIE 11-6-63, 24 April 1963.

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7. A part of the difference in view over questions of this sort -- and they are repeated in one form or another in virtually every country where the USSR is represented -- stems from lack of knowledge. Obviously if we knew that a given minister with policy-making authority in country X was on the Soviet payroll, we would readily reach the judgment that the USSR was able to and probably did influence country X's policy. But in the vast majority of cases, the situation is more along the following lines. Country Y takes action detrimental to US interests. We have evidence one way or another about the extent of Soviet influence in Y; we merely know that there are so many Soviets there. If we judge that the general anti-colonial posture of Y is sufficient to account for the policies it follows, then we are challenged to prove by some of our readers that the Soviets were not involved, i.e. to prove a negative.

8. It should be obvious that there is not ready choice in such situations beyond the familiar one of relying on established patterns of behaviour on the part of Y. There is also the

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familiar rhetorical device of not seeking a complicated answer if a simpler one -- in this case the anti-colonialism of Y -- will do. But the real difficulty underlying disputes such as this is not one of interpretation of evidence, but rather differing appreciations of Soviet intentions -- intentions in the specific and in the frame of overall strategy.

9. In the matter of analysing and assessing Soviet intentions the same two schools of thought come into play, although in a slightly different fashion. The containment school generally subscribes to the belief that the USSR is straining every effort to defeat and destroy the US. Its spokesmen tend to ascribe great effectiveness to Soviet actions and hence to judge that substantial activity on the part of the USSR must have substantial results. These results are most often recorded in a belief that great influence follows large aid and training missions.

10. The inevitability school -- and the reader will no doubt by now have realized that the drafter belongs to it -- is likely to reject the above "worst possible" thesis. It recognizes that the worst possible may, and indeed probably will, occur once in a while; Castro and Sukarno are examples. But it also believes, and has the experience of history to support it, that in the majority of cases something less than

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the worst imaginable usually prevails. The school concedes to the Soviets the intent to outclass the US, but stresses limitations on carrying such intent. It argues from the US experience of 20 years of economic and military aid around the world that influence on countries to which we have given large amounts of aid is a chancy and uneven thing. For example, there are only a few countries

which Washington can force to do something against their wishes. And even this is not always possible.

11. Another source of contention among those examining Soviet activities in the Middle East and Africa appears to come from differing ways of looking at the way in which geographic, political, and military or strategic considerations intermesh. Thus, we have on several occasions become involved in disputes over the significance of political control by a Soviet client over a strategically located area. Thus, the question has been raised about the Soviet's potential someday to control both ends of the Red Sea through friendly regimes in Cairo and Mogadiscio or Aden. The Moroccans are pushing a line that Soviet Union is using Algeria to subvert Morocco and that once a republican regime is set up in Rabat, the USSR will have a submarine base on the Atlantic and will proceed to deny Western shipping passage of the Straits of Gibraltar. (Foolish? This thesis triggered an NIE request this winter).

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12. Someone once said that generals fight wars with tactics learned from the previous war and often out of date even then. Something of the same seems to be involved here, too, for much of the geopolitical argument on which denial of a body of water appears to be based was undeniably valid in the days of conventional warfare, surface raiders, gunnery duels at sea, shots across the bow, and the like. In the 1960s, nations simply do not engage in such activities; they are forever looking over their shoulders to insure that a given action is not the first step toward nuclear war. Thus free use of an Egyptian-controlled harbor at Aden would be of value to the USSR for a variety of purposes, including support of clandestine operations in Africa, but it almost certainly would not be used to prevent Western shipping from using the Red Sea. The consequences of such an effort are too risky.

13. But how to find truth and how to convey that truth to the reader of estimates is our problem. Bearing in mind that the separation of views with which this paper began is over-simplified and distorted to some extent at least, we who write estimates or who pass judgment on them keep coming back to the same questions.

- a. What is the Soviet intention in the Third world over the coming few decades, a communized world, a position of balance vis-a-vis the US (which would include a

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or enough strength to prevent the US from doing what it wants when it wants?

- b. What does Moscow want in terms of military and naval facilities -- bases, usage, stockpiling? Are its military aid programs designed with a military end in mind or as a means of political influence? If both, which is more important?
- c. What can the USSR get in terms of influence for its economic and military aid and political support?
- d. In concentrating our attention and judgments on the coming two to five years, are we giving inadequate attention to the cumulative effect of tens of years? For example, Egypt had 70 years of Western domination, this left its mark: in terms of education, commercial preferences, language; what will, say, 30 years of close relationships with the Soviets and East Europeans do?
- e. Do significant policy-making elements in Moscow accept the win-lose philosophy, and act on it?

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